

Custom Essay

Analysis of the Causes of Homelessness

[Student's Name]

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Analysis of the Causes of Homelessness

Most, if not all, cities around the world battle homelessness at varying degrees. Homelessness is a societal problem that encompasses economic, health, psychological, and racial factors. The US government has implemented numerous policies and plans to solve the problem, however, these always fall short because they fail to take into account the complexity of the problem. To solve the problem of homelessness, it is important to understand that this problem is caused by a multitude of compounding personal, interpersonal, and socioeconomic factors, with each individual being uniquely affected. In this analytical essay, the author analyzes how major factors intermingle and exacerbate each other, leading individuals and families to homelessness.

Defining Homelessness

There is a lack of international consensus concerning the definition of homelessness. What countries agree on is that homelessness is the lack of housing, permanent or otherwise (The Law and Homelessness: Definition, 2021). There are different forms or patterns of homelessness—temporary, episodic, and chronic—which may range from a short period of homelessness to more than a year of sleeping in the streets (Institute of Medicine, 1988). Homelessness, however, is not confined to the lack of shelter; rather, it involves other aspects of life, including poor hygiene; lack of access to healthcare, education, job; vulnerability to the weather, violence, and so on (Institute of Medicine, 1988). Understanding how these factors push individuals toward homelessness and additional issues exacerbate situations is important in solving homelessness.

Homelessness in the US

Nowadays, the problem of homelessness affects a wide range of the population, including minority races, LGBTQ+, women, families, veterans, and mentally ill individuals (Henry et al., 2020). The Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reported in its Annual Point-in-Time Count in 2020 that 580,466 people in America were experiencing homelessness (Henry et al., 2020). Of these, 60.7% are male, 38.5% are female, 0.5% are Transgender, and 0.3% are gender non-conforming. In terms of race, white people make up 48.3% of the population, 39.4% are Black, 1.3% are Asian, 3.3% are Native American, 1.6% are Pacific Islander, and 6.1% are multiple races (Henry et al., 2020). Homelessness affects diverse people, which confirms that its causes are as diverse as well.

Reasons of Homelessness

As mentioned earlier, there is a multitude of intermingled issues that lead a person or a family toward homelessness. Schneider (2020) cites a 2007 study titled “Ending Homelessness in Los Angeles” which revealed that the three primary factors that lead people toward homelessness are loss of material resources, loss of family or social connections, and loss of health. Each of these factors consists of sub-factors, including insufficient low-cost housing supply, low income and poor work opportunities, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, and decline in public assistance (Institute of Medicine, 1988). The discussion below analyzes how the issues overlap due to their cyclical relationship.

Loss of Material Resources

Loss of material resources may appear in the form of poverty or job loss, as well as loss of tools (i.e., car) and welfare benefits. External factors, such as economic recessions and lack of adequate job opportunities, may cause these situations. Conversely, it may be the result of mental illness or substance abuse, or recent deinstitutionalization (Fowler, Hovmand, Marcal, and Das, 2019). Veterans, for instance, often have to manage mental illness and/or substance abuse while also struggling with poor job opportunities.

Loss of welfare benefits, due to changes in policies, is another form of material resource. Welfare benefits help people make ends meet, so its absence may mean food insecurity or housing insecurity. Loss of material resources does not only push people toward homelessness but also makes it hard for them to reintegrate.

Loss of Family or Social Connections

Loss of family or social connections may occur as a result of mental illness or substance abuse, recent deinstitutionalization, or even job loss. However, it is also possible for homeless people to lose family or social connections as a result of homelessness. Women and children fleeing from abusive households may also find themselves without family or social connections, in addition to losing material resources (Fowler, Hovmand, Marcal, and Das, 2019). The existence of support systems makes a huge difference in preventing a person or a family from falling into chronic homelessness (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2015). Family and social connections are support systems on which people struggling with personal

problems can rely on—can be in the form of friends and family and the government or welfare institutions.

Loss of Health

People already struggling with mental or physical illnesses have to pay for high healthcare costs. When coupled with poor job opportunities or low income, healthcare costs become a burden that they may push aside for food or rent (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2015), therefore worsening their health outcomes.

Worsened mental or physical health, or relapse to substance abuse, definitely have adverse effects on an individual's employment and social connections. When a person's health declines, this may lead to homelessness, especially if there is no available support.

Conclusion

Loss of material resources, loss of social connections, and loss of health have a cyclical relationship with each other and with homelessness. These issues may lead someone toward homelessness; conversely, homelessness exacerbates these issues, making it more difficult for individuals and families to reintegrate into society. Evidently, homelessness is often caused by a variety of issues that are beyond an individual's control. It is important to understand homelessness as a complex issue rooted in all aspects of society for governments and organizations to formulate a comprehensive solution.

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